



EMORY UNIVERSITY

Department of African American Studies

Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Fall 2017

Dear Friends of African American Studies,

Fall 2017 promises to be an engaging, exciting time. The Department of African American Studies continues to experience a renaissance as new faculty join our ranks (more about that in the next newsletter); our research continues to shape and influence the public discourse around race, rights, resistance, and democracy; and our students soar as they achieve their goals.

In the spring, Samantha Perlman was awarded Woodruff Library's Alan Rackoff Prize for the best senior honors thesis, which charted Emory University's responses to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the civil rights movement, and the "fierce urgency of now!" Similarly, Andrew (Drew) Sullins won the Elizabeth Atwood Undergraduate Research Award for examining the complexities of drone warfare, mounting civilian deaths, and the not-so-grey areas of international law. Meanwhile, Aamira Brown earned highest honors for her senior honors thesis—a brilliant comparative analysis of underrepresented minority undergraduates and white students in STEM fields and the factors that influenced their decisions to either stay or switch majors.

Our faculty shine as well. This past spring Dianne Stewart was awarded a senior fellowship from the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry. At Commencement, I was honored to receive the University Scholar-Teacher Award recognizing my commitment to students' engagement and that my book, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide*, was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for criticism. Michael Harris curated yet another powerful exhibit—this time of Alison Saar's work, which was on display at the Harvey Gantt Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In this issue, you will see more of our ongoing commitment to our students and to excellence.

Sincerely,

Carol Anderson

Chair, African American Studies



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Education's highest potential: Vanessa Siddle Walker embodies it

Walker joined the faculty of African American Studies in 2015 as the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of African American Studies. For 27 years, she has explored the segregated schooling of African American children, considering the climate that permeated the schools, the network of professional collaborations that explains their similarity, and the hidden systems of advocacy that sought equality and justice.

Her research focuses on segregated schools from the period of Reconstruction until 1970. Acknowledging that we already recognize the injustice inherent in the fact that American schools were segregated, Walker says that the question is, “What did people do in spite of the facts? What was the resilience of the community?”

After completing her EdD at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, Walker began talking with teachers who had worked in the schools before 1970. She recalls that they told her, “We had a good school.” Her response was, “I don't know how a segregated school could have been ‘good.’” Her book, *Their Highest Potential*, is the result of Walker's exploration of these segregated schools. She says, “These [teachers] were not reduced by these larger negative messages [of segregation]; they reconstructed those messages and made children believe that they could achieve. So, we don't want to go back to segregation, but we do want to learn how they taught.”

Teaching in the Urban South (TITUS) is a project that grew out of Walker's research, which led her to identify not only pedagogical

models that explore how students teach and learn, but also professional development models and the ways in which educators can learn from each other to create better school models.

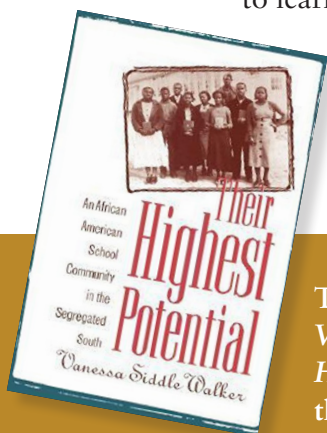
“If you do this work long enough, you start to look at yourself in the mirror and say, ‘Something's wrong about just writing or even lecturing about it but not doing anything about it, right?’ And so we decided to do something about it. We decided to take the historical model and use it as a map.”

And so the TITUS project began. At the time, Walker was the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Educational Studies at Emory. “I had a group of eight really committed doctoral students—they got course credit; that's all they got—and we met once a week, and we went out into Atlanta urban schools. We identified seven schools, and the principals came in during the summer and did professional development with me.” Walker and her students began to provide other services to the schools during the course of the year, including hosting a professional development day at the most resource-poor schools in DeKalb County. The response was enormous. Says Walker, “Literally, the people wouldn't go home. . . . So, it was a pilot year, and it was really very successful.”

When Walker came to the Department of African American Studies, she said she “had no thought at all as to whether [TITUS] would really work [with undergraduates].” She decided the students would work in the most resource-poor school in DeKalb County—Cedar Grove High School. When the doctoral students implemented the TITUS program, they did it as professional development. “We were



Vanessa Siddle Walker



Their Highest Potential by
Vanessa Siddle Walker.
Her newest book, *Living
the Legacy*, is in press now.

continued

working with school leaders,” Walker says. “But undergraduates can’t do that, right? So you have to build on what undergraduates can do. And the one thing undergraduates know is how to get into college. And we match that with the needs at Cedar Grove.”

Now implementing TITUS with undergraduates, Walker says, “I take them out to Cedar Grove, and the teachers will say, ‘These are the things we need for our students this year.’ And then our students come back and meet with me, and then I teach them lesson planning.” The Emory students teach in teams of two and tailor their lessons to the needs of the students. Some groups might focus on SAT preparation while others work with high school students on preparing their college applications. Walker says, “You watch our students build these bonds with these high school students in the five or so times that they’re out there, and the high school students respond to them.”

Walker highlights that the Emory students are learning “about the possibilities for students in [urban schools], about the ways in which the challenges are really very different from how we had imagined them in the literature and the press. They’re learning up close what a difference people can actually make in the schools.”

And even as the Emory students go into the school, the school also has to come to Emory. She says that in its founding principles, the idea of TITUS was, “I don’t just go to your house, but you come to my house too. So, following that model, the students also come to Emory for a ‘college day.’ ”

By this point in the semester, Walker says, “[The Emory students] really think they are teachers. Their identity has changed. These are their children, and they are very clear on what their children need to experience while they’re at Emory. I tell them, ‘You guys remind me of doctoral students.’ ”

Walker’s students plan it all: the tour groupings, what the large group experiences are going to be, what the individual experiences are going to be. Everything is tailored to individual student needs.



Cedar Grove High School students try out Emory for a day

“Last year was the second year I watched the big yellow bus pull up—the high school students are ecstatic. They’re out of school—that always makes them happy—but they’re coming, in effect, on a college tour that’s planned just for them,” Walker says.

She stresses that they’re not encouraging the high school students to come to Emory, but that Emory is simply an exemplar of a college. “You’re at Emory, and you have lunch in the dining hall, or you go visit a class, or you all go to a dorm, or whatever. Then what you have is a framework, a template for when you are looking at your own schools.” In the same spirit of exchange of ideas, Pamela Benford, principal at Cedar Grove, also comes to Emory annually to give the Horace Edward Tate Lecture on urban education practices.

In July, Walker attended the Reimagining Education Summer Institute at Teachers College at Columbia University, where she gave the opening keynote about the African American Pedagogical Model to teachers from 20 different states and three different countries. She says, “It’s actually drawing on 100 years of pedagogical knowledge, [and] when you put the context on the present, it’s really powerful.” After the institute, a former colleague from Harvard asked her, “Who knows best about how this model works?” She responded, “Emory undergraduates.”

Walker concludes, “To see the passions that they are bringing, and the commitments, and the real desire for change, and then to try to help them think about how to change, that’s a great thing. That is what has inspired me to teach.”

A ‘major’ recommendation from Truman Scholar Chelsea Jackson

Chelsea Jackson, an African American Studies and political science double major, was named a Harry S. Truman Scholar in April 2017. The Truman Scholarship is a national honor awarded to students who have demonstrated outstanding leadership, academic excellence, and a commitment to a life of public service. To learn more about the honor, see the feature in *Emory Report* at http://news.emory.edu/stories/2017/04/er_upress_truman_scholar_jackson/campus.html.

In line with the qualities that earned her the award, Jackson recently was accepted into the Department of Political Science’s BA/MA program, meaning she will earn both degrees in political science upon completion of four years of college work. As a part of the dual degree, she will complete a master’s thesis on black prosecutors and their role in mass incarceration of people of color.



Chelsea Jackson, a current African American Studies student, was named a Harry S. Truman Scholar in April

When asked about her decision to major in African American Studies alongside political science, Jackson attributes much of her decision to her Introduction to African American Studies course. In talking about the class, she said, “It blew my mind open. Dr. [Pellom] McDaniels, he really gave us that foundation in the theory, and we learned about the discipline [of black studies]. We learned how it was formed—that black students were the driving force behind it—and the purpose of African American Studies.”

When Jackson told her mother that she was going pursue African American Studies as a second major, she was met with the question, “What are you going to do with African American Studies?” She brought her question to McDaniels, who replied, “Chelsea, what can’t you do with African American Studies? Because we do sociology, we do economics, we do political science, we do history—we do all the other disciplines.” Jackson’s mother was thoroughly impressed with that response.

“If I could put any suggestion out there,” Jackson says, “it would be to major in AAS—or minor, take some classes.” She considers her classmates from that class her cohort within the major. “AAS has been a really formative place for us in our scholarship,” she says, “and for me particularly in my writing and the way I view the world. I want people to experience it. Do it. Major.”

Former debater makes the case for AAS



Marcus Jerkins is grateful to AAS for putting the needs of its students “at the center”

Marcus Jerkins 06C is no stranger to obstacles and challenging times, having been born to parents who struggled to raise him. But at the age of nine, the path of his life changed drastically when he was sent to live with his grandmother. It was there, in southwest Atlanta—Adamsville—that she introduced him to the black church and helped him discover a love for God.

Intrigued by the history of the black church, Jerkins became interested in the founding documents of the Christian faith. His interest centered on how those documents were used to propagate the gospel and how the black church could use them to fight against systemic racism.

Not unlike Martin Luther King Jr. defining civil rights based on the needs of the church, Jerkins takes the same approach in utilizing the New Testament to fight racism. This is what led him to pursue a PhD in religion at Baylor University.

Jerkins learned of Emory as a sophomore at Benjamin E. Mays High School, where the Bark-

ley Forum Center for Debate Education/Urban Debate League would encourage students to participate in the National Forensic League. Jerkins initially was interested in participating in quiz bowl, but when he went to the information sessions for the Urban Debate League, he decided to sign up for the debate team. Being on the debate team stoked his passion for argument and it is where he learned about policy and law.

He first set foot on Emory’s campus to attend debate camp. After more exposure, he decided that this was the place he wanted to attend college. In order to be accepted as a student, Jerkins knew that he would need to improve his grades, and he credits his participation on the debate team as part of reason he was able to do so.

When Jerkins initially entered Emory College, he was not sure what he wanted to study but was interested in both prelaw and political science. However, after his second year at Emory, he began to transition away from the debate team and started becoming more interested in religion and African American Studies.

After taking Introduction to African American Studies, taught then by Mark Sanders, his interest continued to grow. Although Jerkins claims his writing skills were poor and he did not do well in the class, Sanders took a special interest in him and, as Jerkins states, “helped me cultivate my talent.” Sanders pulled him aside and, according to Jerkins, stated, “I see potential in you, let’s get your writing skills up.”

To have a black professor believe in him and encourage his desire for knowledge led Jerkins to take more AAS classes. He found all of the professors in the department “to be a good cadre of advocates to help me fight and fight for myself.” He also credits Sanders for encouraging him to apply for the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program at Emory (see page 7), to which he was accepted.

continued

In addition to taking AAS courses, Jerkins continued to pursue his interest in religion. One course shy of double majoring in AAS/religion, he completed his thesis with Dianne Stewart. In researching his thesis, Jerkins was exposed to Benjamin E. Mays's book, *The Negro's God*. From it, he began to construct his idea that scripture can provide rich resources to unseat racism.

“Our own history and perspective are marginal in this society, and AAS takes what is marginal and puts it at the center.”

When reflecting on how AAS contributed to his scholarly formation, Jerkins states that not only did AAS teach him discipline, it also taught him how to approach form and content. “AAS is inherently interdisciplinary—different fields of study (history, religion, literature)—that come together and form the discipline,” he says. He is now bringing all those ways of doing study (in-depth interpretation, reviewing hard data, reading, and researching) to bear upon the study of the New Testament.

As it relates to content, Jerkins sees AAS as a discipline that studies a culture of people who have been underserved, mistreated, and mal-adjusted and then focuses on how they can be helped. The same approach should govern studying the New Testament. Jerkins has found that people who tend to study it do not see lack of privilege, a fact that concerns him, given that the writers of the New Testament were commoners and not people of privilege. AAS, in his view, has helped him have an eye toward empathy, oppression, and privilege and how best to relate and connect with people who come from differing backgrounds. AAS teaches its students to see the power and beauty of the common people and to note that their aesthetic is just as valuable as the elite.

Although Jerkins graduated more than a decade ago, he is still remembered fondly by his former professor, Dianne Stewart. In 2016, she invited Jerkins to attend the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Annual Commencement Banquet and give the keynote address. In her opening line to introduce Jerkins, she stated, “One of the great things about life is that situations do not have to remain the same. One's past does not always dictate one's future. Such is the case for Marcus Jerkins.”

He would agree. Jerkins has overcome many obstacles, both personally and academically, but as he looks toward the next few years of his life, he is determined. He plans to remain heavily involved in church as a pastor/scholar and hopes to be teaching and writing. He believes that church can be a change agent to promote the values that help us remove bias in society.

If Jerkins could give a word of advice to incoming or current students at Emory, he would encourage them not to overlook the discipline. He notes, “Our own history and perspective are marginal in this society, and AAS takes what is marginal and puts it at the center.” He notes that African American history is central to America and the world and that the interdisciplinary nature of AAS will help students engage in other disciplines.

Increasing representation through the MMUF

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and is one of the most distinguished national/international honors programs at Emory. It is administered by African American Studies, and its fundamental objective is to increase the number of underrepresented minority students (and others with a demonstrated commitment to eradicating racial disparities) who will pursue a PhD in Mellon-approved fields in the arts and

sciences. The program seeks to reduce over time the serious underrepresentation of individuals from certain minority groups on the faculties of American and South African colleges and universities, as well as to address the attendant educational consequences of these disparities.

Three Emory MMUF alumni are pursuing PhDs at Harvard University, two are enrolled in doctoral programs at the University of Michigan, and an additional two are pursuing PhDs at New York University. Two other alumni are enrolled in doctoral studies at the University of Texas–Austin. Additionally, Emory’s MMUF program has alumni pursuing PhDs at the University of Georgia, University of Chicago, Baylor University, University of Pittsburgh, Northwestern University, the Graduate Center at CUNY, Ohio State University, University of California–Berkeley, University of California–Santa Barbara, University of California–Davis, Rutgers University, and Brown University. Notably, five of the MMUF alumni who are currently pursuing PhDs were also African American studies majors. For more about our MMUF alumni, visit <http://mellonmays.emory.edu/people/alumni.html>.

During the spring semester, MMUF at Emory hosted its fifth Research Conference, which attracted an audience of faculty, graduate students, MMUF administrators, undergraduate students, and family members of the presenters. The conference format featured Senior Fellows, who presented their MMUF research projects, and Junior Fellows who offered responses to their senior colleagues’ papers. The recently admitted Fellows of Cohort Seventeen were also invited.

Eri Saikawa, faculty mentor to MMUF Fellow Jennifer Fundora, said, “[The] MMUF Research Conference was an opportunity for senior students to present their own research, but it was really where faculty and students get together on equal ground. It was my first time to attend, and I was impressed by the richness in discussion that took place.”



2017 Research Conference participants and attendees



(left) Faculty Mentor Eri Saikawa at the 2017 Research Conference
(right) Cohort Sixteen Fellow Jennifer Fundora, responding to Fellow Clara Perez’s presentation

Christell Roach's 'Striving Village'

Christell Roach transferred to Emory in fall 2016. As she began to make friends in the black community on campus, many people told her to apply to MMUF. She knew immediately, upon looking into the program, that it was something she wanted to do. "It is geared toward getting more people who look like me into the professoriate, which is something that is important to me."

She says that before she transferred to Emory, she found it very difficult not to have professors who looked like her. But it wasn't until she declared her major in African American Studies that she realized how important it was to her to see people of color in the professoriate. Originally, she was majoring in creative writing, but her father convinced her that since she was writing about black people and she already was taking so many AAS classes, she should declare a second major. "This is representation," she says. "And seeing that [representation] is the whole mission of MMUF, that really resonated with me."

Two classes that helped Roach get into the mindset of being an MMUF fellow were Nathan McCall's Black Images in the Media and Michelle Gordon's Black Women Writers. The classes taught her to "basically analyze everything until I think like a scholar." The classes helped her to shape what she's interested in and to ask questions she didn't previously realize she had. They also led her to identify issues where people of color are being misrepresented.

Roach's MMUF mentor is Jericho Brown, who was also an MMUF Fellow. Roach took a poetry workshop with him and says it's been powerful to "see MMUF in practice years later." Brown is helping Roach write poetry that's important to her—"it's a lot of social justice poetry; it's poetry that defines my family, my community, my culture."

She recently completed the United Negro College Fund/Mellon Summer Institute along with the rest of Cohort 17 and Fellows from United Negro College Fund institutions and South African universities. The purpose of the institute is to provide the Fellows with guidance and support in the preparation of a prospectus, which serves as the foundation for a two-year research project with their faculty mentors, and to provide them an opportunity to acquire teaching experience.

Roach says that during the institute, she "felt challenged, and knowing I wasn't alone in the challenge was integral, because if I felt like it was just me, I would have collapsed. The collective striving advised my individual drive to know, to research, to constantly be producing my best in everything that I'm doing, whether it [was] the prospectus, whether it [was] in discussion. I definitely operate off a 'village mentality'—like how they say, 'it takes a village to raise a child'—if my village is striving, I'm striving. If my village is grinding, I'm grinding. I think what I loved most about [the institute] was living scholarship as a lifestyle, like it doesn't really have to stop. I can't turn it off. I love it."



The fall MMUF information session will be held on Wednesday, September 20, from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. in the conference room (Candler Library 207) of the Department of African American Studies.

The best of our best: honors students

The Honors Program in African American Studies provides exceptionally qualified students the opportunity to pursue interdisciplinary research in the African American Studies–related fields of their greatest interest. Under the supervision of a chosen faculty member, students will produce original research that should be their crowning academic achievement as an undergraduate, help to prepare them for graduate school, and promote scholarly excellence in the field of African American Studies.

To graduate with honors, students must have an overall grade point average of 3.50. Students can graduate with one of three levels of honors. Honors (cum laude) represents satisfactory completion of the program; High Honors (magna cum laude) represents completion of the program with outstanding performance, including a thesis of quality sufficient for oral presentation to scholars in the candidate’s field; and Highest Honors (summa cum laude) represents completion of the program with exceptional performance, including a thesis of a quality suitable for publication.

Aamira Brown graduated summa cum laude in spring 2107 with her thesis titled “Paths from STEM: A Qualitative Analysis of the Links between Differences in Black and White Students’ Undergraduate Experiences and Racial Gaps in STEM Attrition Rates.”



Aamira Brown and Professor Brett Gadsden at the 2017 Graduation Dinner

This academic year, Saryiah Benoit will be pursuing honors within the Department of African American Studies. Her research topic is “Black Motherhood in Bankhead Courts during the Atlanta (Child) Murders of 1979–1981.”



Saryiah Benoit presenting at the 2017 Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Research Conference

He took the wake-up call from AAS

The department hosted its annual graduation dinner in April to honor seniors. Bryan Natividad, who graduated in 2016 with a major in African American Studies, was the guest speaker, relating his experiences as an undergraduate and postgraduation.

Currently, Natividad is a Watson Analytics software lead for IBM in the Global Sales and Incentives Transformations department. Recently, he became an IRT (Institute for Recruitment of Teachers) associate and plans to apply to sociology PhD programs for fall 2017.

At April's celebration, Natividad addressed the group by saying, "Being in African American Studies, we know the 'Why African American Studies?' question all too well. When I was first asked that question, I experienced a powerful introspective moment as I answered: 'I have never embraced my [Latin American culture] more nor felt such a strong sense of belonging in a classroom before.' "

Natividad went on to say that before taking a course with Nagueyalti Warren during his first semester as Emory, he "understood the American experience as a universal one that only differed by economic status. You can imagine the kind of wake-up call I went through [in Warren's class]. However, it wasn't a negative one. I felt a connection with the literature, my classmates, my professor, and, most important, my culture. The curriculum became my guide to self-love and critical thought. It led me to seek and understand what part of the American experience I was living—socially, economically, and intellectually."

Natividad continued, "As a Chicano Af-Am major, I felt a responsibility to teach fellow Latinxs the sociological processes that perpetuate anti-blackness, white supremacy, and socioeconomic inequality. During my senior year, with the help of the department, I created an event that . . . discussed anti-blackness in Latinx communities. In my household, social circles, and volunteer groups, I have held discussions that critique anti-blackness . . . , the upholding of Eurocentric beauty standards, and categorization of 'white-only' behaviors



Bryan Natividad was the department's guest speaker at the graduation banquet

"The curriculum became my guide to self-love and critical thought. It led me to seek and understand what part of the American experience I was living."

– 'proper English,' wealth accumulation, college education, etc."

He closed by saying, "I still feel this responsibility, to represent my major and ideological standpoint everyday. Currently in IBM, I have shown my manager, my vice president, and several other executives that my major does not define my limitation, only my potential."

2017–2018 Events of Interest

Note: All lectures will be held in the African American Studies Conference Room, 207 Candler Library, unless otherwise indicated.



september 13

Ashante Reese,
Spelman College

“‘What Is Our
Culture?’: Race,
Food, and
Geographies
of Self-Reliance”

Dark Tower
Lecture Series

september 13

Ashante Reese, James Weldon Johnson Institute UNCF-Mellon Fellow 2017
Dark Tower Lecture Series, Noon

Reese is assistant professor of anthropology at Spelman College. Her research focuses on neighborhoods, race, unequal food access, and the food geographies residents create as they navigate inequalities. While in residence at Emory, Reese is working on the book manuscript “Between a Corner Store and a Safeway: Race and Food Access in the Nation’s Capital.” Her talk is titled “‘What Is Our Culture?’: Race, Food, and Geographies of Self-Reliance.”

september 14

Fall Reception, 5:00 p.m.

october 11

Alexandria Lockett, James Weldon Johnson Institute UNCF-Mellon Fellow 2017
Dark Tower Lecture Series, Noon

Lockett is assistant professor of English at Spelman College. Her research focuses on how scaled information production affects language, culture, and communication. Lockett is especially concerned about the ethics of making, managing, and distributing data. She features this interest in her teaching and service by encouraging her entire community to edit Wikipedia and confront its lack of racial and gender diversity. While in residence at Emory, Lockett is working on the book manuscript “Overflow: Literary and Rhetorical Perspectives on Leaks.” Her talk is titled “Troubled Waters: Leak Warfare and Live Wires.”

january 17

Tim Wise, Martin Luther King Jr. Keynote, “A Time of Reflection,” 5:00 p.m., Cox Hall Ballrooms

Martin Luther King Jr. Keynote



COX HALL BALLROOMS
WEDNESDAY,
JANUARY 17,
5:00 P.M.

“Although white Americans often think we’ve had few firsthand experiences with race, because most of us are so isolated from people of color in our day-to-day lives, the reality is that this isolation *is* our experience with race.”

—Tim Wise, in *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*

About the speaker

Tim Wise, whom scholar and philosopher Cornel West calls “a vanilla brother in the tradition of John Brown,” is among the nation’s most prominent antiracist essayists and educators.

Wise’s antiracism work traces back to his days as a college activist in the 1980s, fighting for divestment from, and imposing economic sanctions on, apartheid South Africa. After graduation, he pursued social justice efforts full-time, as a youth coordinator and associate director of the Louisiana Coalition against Racism and Nazism. From there, he became a community organizer in public housing in New Orleans and a policy analyst for a children’s advocacy group focused on combating poverty and economic inequity. He served as an adjunct professor at the Smith College School of Social Work and was an adviser to the Fisk University Race Relations Institute.

He is the author of seven books, including his highly acclaimed memoir, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, as well as his latest, *Under the Affluence: Shaming the Poor, Praising the Rich, and Sacrificing the Future of America*. His essays have appeared on *Alternet*, *Salon*, *Huffington Post*, *Counterpunch*, *The Root*, and *Black Commentator*, among others.

Wise has been featured in several documentaries, including *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America*. He also appeared alongside legendary scholar and activist Angela Davis in the 2011 documentary *Vocabulary of Change*. Additionally, his media presence includes dozens of appearances on CNN, MSNBC, and NPR, as well as videos posted on YouTube, Facebook, and other social media platforms that have received more than 20 million views.

A graduate of Tulane University, Wise received antiracism training from the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond in New Orleans.